



A thought for today
Is this what 70 years of freedom means for our children?

KAILASH SATYARTHI

Starved Of Oxygen?

Gorakhpur tragedy shockingly underlines shabby state of UP's public healthcare

The stark reality of UP's failing public healthcare system has been highlighted by the Gorakhpur tragedy, where over 60 children died at the Baba Raghav Das Medical College last week. Significantly, the tragedy unfolded in chief minister Yogi Adityanath's home turf – Gorakhpur is a constituency he had represented in Parliament since 1998, until March this year. His government has marshalled statistics to suggest that the fatalities are not unusual given the high patient intake at the hospital. But on the most disturbing charge that children died in the neonatal and encephalitis wards because their oxygen supply was cut off, government's denials remain unconvincing. If this charge is proved, it would be a case of criminal negligence or worse.



Gorakhpur and its adjoining districts have borne the major brunt of the dreaded Japanese encephalitis. It's reported that with fatality rates for severe infections ranging between 20-30%, the disease has been claiming the lives of over 500 infants in this area every year. Uninterrupted oxygen supply is actually the only lifeline for critically infected children. Adityanath should know this well –

in two decades serving as a parliamentarian he asked as many as 89 questions related to the health and family welfare ministry.

The broader problem is that no matter which governments come and go, lack of sanitation, open drains and waterlogged streets remain, and during monsoons they spike Japanese encephalitis cases in eastern UP. What is needed is an extensive door-to-door immunisation programme, where health officers reach out to people rather than the public scrambling to hospitals for basic treatment. Also required is a massive upgrade of healthcare facilities especially at the district and village levels, where the needs of a burgeoning population are dangerously underserved by a shortage of doctors and public hospitals. Here Niti Aayog's proposal of synergising public and private sectors under the PPP model would be helpful.

The immediate need is to provide all possible medical support to Baba Raghav Das Medical College. But this does not mean brushing institutional shortfalls under the carpet. Government inquiry into the Gorakhpur tragedy must not pre-judge the matter but find out the truth about whether the infants' oxygen supply was indeed cut off for non-payment of dues to the supplier. Such a crime must not go unpunished.

Good Riddance

Despotic Pahlaj Nihalani is sacked, now Praseon Joshi must reform the Censor Board

Better late than never. Government has finally heeded repeated calls for sacking CBFC chairperson Pahlaj Nihalani. These calls rose across the film industry, audiences and actually all Indians who want to see the country's soft power flourish. Because under the direction of Nihalani CBFC grew particularly prone to arbitrary "sanskari" decrees, frustrating varied creative visions. Many a filmmaker experienced this CBFC avatar as unenlightened, tyrannical and scissor-happy. Newly appointed chairperson Praseon Joshi therefore has on his hands the task of significant course-correction. Optimism on this front is justified because as adman, lyricist and poet Joshi has a reputation for being thoughtful, having a modern point of view and a good understanding of the medium.



In the long run CBFC needs structural reforms, decreasing its dependency on the personal views of the person heading it. It's been more than a year since the government-appointed committee headed by Shyam Benegal submitted its report on the necessary reforms. The committee recommended that CBFC should only be a film certification body categorising the suitability of films for different audience groups, on the basis of age. This would mean it would no longer be a censor board, its business of demanding beeps and cuts would come to an end.

These reforms must be implemented. But in the meantime, Benegal himself has underlined that the censorship guidelines are not carved in stone, the censors bring their own sensibility and understanding of society to the interpretation of these guidelines. At the least the newly constituted board under Joshi's chairmanship should stop cutting content just because the "length of the kisses were... unnecessarily excessive" or because it was a "lady oriented film" or because it focussed on "fantasy above life".

Dandiya politics

It was a Rajya Soap-a opera in Gujarat, minor characters' stock rose sharply

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In Gujarat, the all-powerful Shah-and-Shah has for once been bested by Patel rap. In the land of the dhokla, the ruling party was forced to admit someone had given it a dhokha. Never before in the history of Indian news television has so much air time been spent on a single Rajya Sabha seat as on Gujarat's recent Rajya Soap-a opera. While BJP attempted to stage a Hum Log by gathering all MLAs under its umbrella, Congress's Ahmed Patel proved that it's best not to meddle with the old guard kyonki saas bhi kabhi bahu thi.

The Gujarat face-off was also like a T20 match where the scoreboard kept shifting every hour. The eventual winner in the Amit Shah vs Ahmed Patel contest was decided by the Duckworth Lewis system with EC playing 'neutral' umpire. Batsman and bowler were the centre of attention but the ball was actually in the hands of a deep third man.

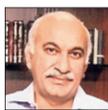
For Gujaratis who expertly track the rise and fall of the stock market, this was a day when politics became dalal street. The characters in the drama, erstwhile minor netas who suddenly became national figures, saw their stock rise sharply and command more political equity than ever before. The share price of the Gujarat MLA skyrocketed as the political market readied for a bull run. For example Chhotubhai Vasava, the single JD(U) MLA from a remote constituency in Bharuch suddenly became a market sensation, causing the madcap index to swing wildly. There were diametrically opposite reports about how Vasava had actually voted. While his party declared he had voted BJP, he kept insisting he had voted for Congress. In the end Chhotubhai became Patel's bada bhai when it was 'revealed' he had in fact voted for him. Another MLA, NCP's Jayantbhai Patel Boskey, clearly felt he held the key. Boskey played Big Boss, keeping both sides on the edge.

Navratra came early to Gujarat with netas playing political dandiya. But those who carried big sticks could not prevent others from dancing in circles. Earlier we saw the Congress play the politics of the last resort to defeat BJP by airlifting its MLAs to Bengaluru. But this single setback in Gujarat is only a minor correction in the BJP's sensex which is zooming to new heights. Citizens however are suffering from market pessimism. In Gujarat, floods have claimed more than 200 lives this year and soon murky political floodwaters may rise above voters' heads.

Mission Possible: A New India

PM is using India's high-quality, low-cost technology to lift 400 million out of poverty by 2022

MJ Akbar



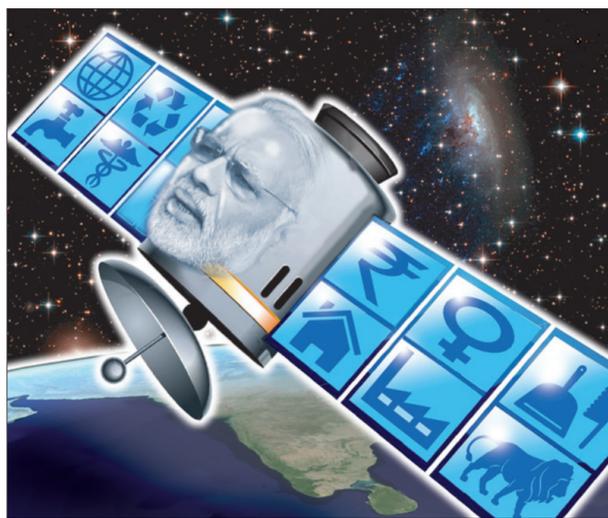
On 15 February this year, Isro placed 104 satellites into orbit using only a single launch of one vehicle, PSLV-C37. The video of the event, available easily enough on the net, shows the familiar zoom of a rocket entering space, and then little flicks chase one another into the deep distance until the mission is completed. Only three satellites were Indian; 96 were commissioned by two American companies, Planet Labs and Spire Global.

The acceleration in space, impressive as it is, might be less spectacular than the change taking place on the ground. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has initiated a transformation towards a new India in which historic burdens such as poverty and corruption have been eliminated, and inheritance ills like communalism and casteism are only bad memory. His mission has a calendar; the deadline is 2022, when India celebrates its 75th year of independence.

Transformative change needs radical thinking. The economic empowerment of women is being used as a principal cure for poverty. Under Mudra, the PM's signature project for those at the base of the economic pyramid, loans worth Rs 3,55,590 crore have been disbursed. Remarkably, 78% of those taking these loans are women.

The PM's housing plan, for the impoverished, is an equally big story in gender emancipation. A woman can take this home loan as sole owner; but a man needs a woman as co-owner unless he is a widower or bachelor. This is a fundamental shift in the balance of power within a family. Over 25 million women who thought that a gas cylinder was a privilege of the middle class or rich, are now in smokeless kitchens. Swachh Bharat is a means to dignity and better health for women. The list is long.

The objective is to lift about 400 million out of harsh poverty in five years by ensuring that the first fruits and largest share of economic growth go to those who need it most. In a complementary initiative, the



PM is using India's proven capability in high-quality, low-cost technology to create efficient, sustainable and corruption-free delivery systems for direct benefits to the poor on an unprecedented scale.

Jan Dhan was an essential first step. In 2015, within three months, banks opened 300 million accounts for those who had never crossed the doors of a bank before. Critics sneered that these were "cashless". Unsurprisingly, they had missed the point: banks were now serving those without money rather than those with.

Use of technology for transparency has also become mandatory in the bidding process for government contracts. In a country where, particularly during the long decade between 2004 and 2014, contracts became synonymous with corruption, the change is a virtual revolution, leaving sections of the old political-industrial complex frustrated, angry and desperate to restore the previous order.

New India is being fashioned from embers of the old. Sceptics who cannot fathom why Narendra Modi has become

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the most popular PM in memory need look no further than his comprehensive assault on poverty and corruption.

It surely cannot be anyone's case that through some twirl of a magic wand, India should suddenly become free of all ills. Among our difficult legacies is the politics of Hindu-Muslim differences, a tragedy that has simmered and often bubbled into conflict. One long-standing dispute has been over the cow, held sacred in Hinduism. Mahatma Gandhi urged an end to cow slaughter; and the lead

architect of our Constitution, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, included this as a guiding tenet of our Constitution. Beef was banned in most states by Congress governments.

Of late, cow vigilantes have attacked Muslims and Dalits on suspicion of eating or transporting beef. Two incidents attracted wide, and understandable, media coverage: of Pehlu Khan in Rajasthan and Junaid in Haryana.

No government can prevent crime. A government's bona fides are tested by what it does in pursuit of the criminal. In Rajasthan, seven suspects have been charged with murder. The state's chief minister Vasundhara Raje has dismissed as malicious the allegation that her administration was biased and argued the same in this newspaper, in an open piece headlined 'Mob violence is unacceptable' (27 July). Comparisons are not an answer, but she pointed out that murders and mob violence took a higher tally in Rajasthan in 2012, when Congress was in power. In Haryana, five were arrested but the main suspect escaped. Police traced him to Sakri, in Maharashtra, where he thought he had found safety in obscurity. He has now confessed to stabbing Junaid.

On 29 June, PM Modi expressed his anguish during the centenary event of Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat, wondering how much pain Gandhi himself would have felt. Gandhi had offered to die for the cow, but never advocated violence in its name. Finance minister Arun Jaitley has described the incidents as barbaric.

Both voters and politicians are increasingly dismissive of the motivated and fraying narrative of extended guilt. Nitish Kumar, for instance, refused to buy this false propaganda of Congress, whose only electoral crutch now is the alleged insecurity of minorities.

In 2013, there was an assassination attempt on Narendra Modi during a rally in Patna. At that critical, volatile moment, he said that Hindus and Muslims had a choice: they could either fight each other, or they could unite to fight the true enemy, poverty. Fraternity and prosperity of all Indians is the only creed of Narendra Modi.

The writer is Union Minister of State for External Affairs

'When a woman uses law, she is accused of misuse; when an Indian woman uses law, she is labelled with bad character'

The Supreme Court's recent direction stopping arrests or coercive action against accused husbands or their relatives charged in anti-dowry complaints under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code without ascertaining the veracity of the allegations marks a shift in Indian jurisprudence on women-related issues. Indira Jaising, former additional solicitor general and senior SC advocate, spoke to Sugandha Indulkar on why she thinks the order, which stipulates that all states must set up family welfare committees in each district to verify such complaints, will adversely affect anti-dowry cases:

■ How you define 'use' and 'misuse' of law with respect to the recent SC directives on anti-dowry provisions under Section 498A of IPC?

The word 'misuse' is itself misused by the courts. Whenever a woman uses the law, she is told she is misusing it; shockingly, when an Indian woman accesses the law, she is often labelled as a woman of bad character. It is a classic case of victim blaming. Good women are bound by 'maryada' and so they don't go to the law. The court too looks at the woman who demands application of Section 498A as: here comes another one who is misusing the law.

In a patriarchal society, where women are often

subjected to violence, Section 498A was a great respite. In the majority of Indian families, a newly-wed couple lives in a joint family, where the bahu is living with her in-laws. If such a woman is tortured, physically or mentally, within the first two years of marriage and is thrown out of her matrimonial house, she is left with no option but to resort to legal action against her persecutors – including her parents-in-law – who at times connive with their son.

Despite such ground realities, courts are saying women are misusing the law by adding parents to the FIR. This ruling dilutes the very purpose of the law.

■ But the judiciary has pointed out that a large number of cases where elderly parents are being prosecuted are not bona

fide. Your comments?

The judiciary cannot go by numbers alone. It has to treat every individual case as per its merit. 'Misuse of law' is a sweeping generalisation, which then becomes a benchmark, quoted in support of the next judgment. Rulings in such cases cannot be made based on previous rulings, or mere police statements or general public opinions. If the judges wanted to establish that women misuse the law, they should have called for data from experts. They should have analysed at least a thousand cases of violence against women and then come to a rational conclusion.

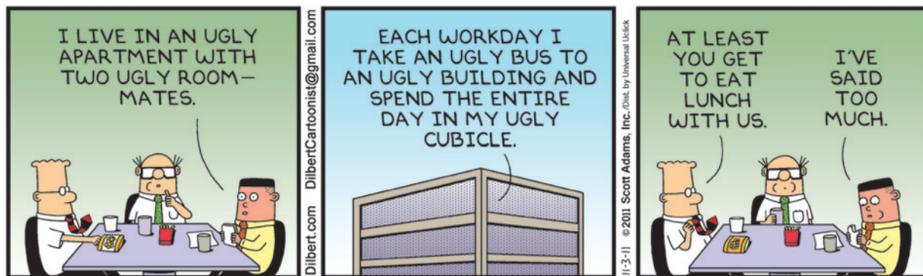
■ Do we need to have gender-neutral laws? Shouldn't there be strong action taken against people who abuse laws?

Across the world, women are subjected to domestic violence. This is not unique to India. However, in India, dowry deaths take this violence leagues ahead of rest of the world, and therefore, particularly here we need strong laws.

I agree that strong action must be taken against anyone who abuses law. I do not support elderly men and women being arrested and roped in for no reason by anyone. No law should be misused by anyone. An allegation by a woman is not enough to make an arrest. The police must investigate the matter and then register a complaint, under the sections they deem fit.



dilbert



Pulkit Sharma

Supreme consciousness becomes manifest in various elements of creation through the play of the Divine Mother. To realise that we are a part of the Supreme consciousness, we need to surrender to the Mother and seek her grace. In Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga, the Divine Mother is at the centre and everything that we have, belongs to her: The purpose of our life is fulfilled only when we become an instrument of the Divine Mother.

The Mother is one, but appears before us differently, each appearance representing her diverse powers and facets. Maheshwari is full of wisdom, peace and compassion and she nurtures everyone based on their intentions and actions to march forward towards the truth. Mahakali is the embodiment of staggering strength and force and she vehemently uproots all anti-divine forces in individuals so that they make

swift progress. Mahalakshmi is the personification of divine beauty, harmony and bliss and she encourages us to refine our being so that there is harmony and beauty within and around us. Mahasaraswati is the epitome of knowledge and excellence and bestows upon us a relentless spirit of perfection which encourages us to act according to the divine plan.

When an individual reaches a particular high point in spiritual development, these four powers of the Divine Mother find their harmony and freedom of movement within jiva, the individual consciousness. Consequently, Mahashakti or universal mother becomes manifest and unites us with the light and bliss of Supreme consciousness.

According to Sri Aurobindo, if this spiritual growth could be carried out at a substantial collective level, human

nature will be permanently transformed into dynamic divine nature. Evolution of consciousness can be possible only when two great powers that are within us and also potentially present everywhere in the universe, work in synchronisation. The first is a relentless aspiration in the heart of the jiva to become one with the Supreme and the second is the grace of the Mother. While the grace of the Divine Mother is omnipresent, it is often our aspiration that is fickle. Therefore, we need to strengthen and refine our aspiration so that its flame burns perpetually.

Sri Aurobindo elucidates a three-pronged approach of surrender, plasticity and rejection through which we can work on our aspiration. Surrender needs to be constant, vigorous and complete. At all times, the individual must actively

Sacredspace

Become Wise

How to become wise?
By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.

Confucius

Everything We Have, Belongs To Her



offer each and every part of his being to the Divine Mother. No part of the self should resist or shy away from this movement under any pretext because grace is able to do its work only when surrender is total. Besides this, one needs to cultivate plasticity so that the power of the Mother can enter within and bring transformation. A lot of times, higher power is waiting to guide and uplift us, but because of our tunnel vision and rigid notions, we are unable to receive it. Therefore, it is crucial to let go of all preconceived notions and become malleable to the will of the Mother.

The component of rejection requires us to scan ourselves thoroughly and identify everything within us that is false. Once we know it, we need to make repeated, unflinching efforts in rejecting it so that anti-divine forces do not impede our transformation. Once we do our bit, the Divine Mother does the work.

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